



(U) What Does a Leader Do? (repost)

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(U) *Note from SIGINT Communications: This article was posted on September 4, 2003, as part of [Charles Berlin's series on leadership](#).*

(U) So far in this series, I have suggested that people are good and that leadership makes a difference. From the feedback I have received, I say that these ideas are not universally held - but getting us talking about this is really what we are after. Discuss these premises with your office mates and see what you think.

(U) Meanwhile, let's talk about what a leader does:

(U//FOUO) A Leader is Prepared. Let's face it: this is a technical agency with technical people. A leader must be technically savvy and up-to-date on our business. You are not going to succeed as a leader unless you are an expert in your field. Know the mission and know the technical underpinnings of it. Get out and make your bones. If this means taking a job that is "lower" than the one you have now, take it. If it means going to night school, do it. NSA is a winner because of expert people who know what they are doing - our successes look like mirades to our customers, but we know it was not hardware or software but human brainpower ("wetware") that made it happen. Yes, I know the OPM competencies don't include technical expertise on the senior P3's, but don't fool yourself - it doesn't list future potential either, but that figures in every promotion authority's judgment. Become an expert manager as well. Learn the resource game, get some experience in finance and the other enabling areas. Your ability to use mission-based, technical judgment in resource decisions will make or break you as a leader here at NSA.

(U) A Leader Develops Other Leaders. Guess what? The main job of the leader is actually **not** getting the mission done. Your people will do that. Your main job is developing the next generation and finding the ones who will take your job someday. This means you will have to make the organization suffer a bit to make sure talented, high potential people get leadership training and developmental jobs. This is an investment, not a cost. An important job for leaders in this regard is talent spotting. The truth is, everyone is not equal (yikes!). A leader must make a judgment about people and take action to accelerate the careers of those who show promise. This is not cronyism or illegal discrimination; it is a duty. Find, identify and develop the best people - they are the next generation.

(U) A Leader is a Servant. Speaking of the generations, we have more than one in the workplace today (perhaps as many as four!). We have a unique challenge to transfer the experience and knowledge of the baby boomers to the Gen X and Gen Y folks we have been hiring. A leader seeks to understand the generations and facilitate the knowledge transfer. The younger generation will challenge us old fogies in this transfer. They are not employees - they consider themselves "consumers of management services". The role of a leader will change as a true collaborative environment emerges. "Your people" will be working on someone else's project even as they sit in "your spaces". The leader's role may shift to more of a talent scout and talent agent for the individual employee rather than the director of work. So individual and team development is the focus. In the hierarchical model, the middle manager had a primary role of conveying information up and down the chain. In a transparent network, the information passes itself. The leader now must focus on delivery of services to the workforce (resources, tools, training, etc). Your value-added will rest not with your position but your ability to deliver. Day to day, the leader becomes a linchpin servant, serving the boss and the employee. Are you

ready?

(U) A Leader Cares . You have to know your people and care for them. These are actually people, not machines. When I took over the job I am in now, I went around and interviewed each person to get to know them. I asked about their history and their future. I also asked some personal questions about family, home and the commute. A few employees wondered if I had any legal right to ask those questions! I said I had no right but that I cared about the answers. None chose not to answer. I found richness in their lives and it helps me every day to remember they are not "assets", "workforce", "annuitants", "char force" or "cost centers". They are great Americans with hopes and dreams for themselves, their families and their country. They are worthy of a leader's care. You are expected to expend effort on these people's behalf. You cannot care from a distance or at a theoretical level. You actually have to do something. What have you done lately?

(U) Care for the mission too. Sometimes I think we are trying to wash passion out of our culture. Lots of cold hard statistics and metrics to light the way. I don't want you to let the metrics tell you things aren't going to work, I want you to declare emphatically that you will make it work with all the heart you have. Don't let the future happen to you - make the future happen. It takes a bit of passion for a leader to succeed. Do you have the strength of spirit to lead?

(U) A Leader Communicates . Here's some news: passion for the mission and caring for the people can actually be communicated. It's catchy, it's infectious. It shouldn't be a secret! A major component in keeping hope alive is a healthy conversation with your people. In this conversation, a leader communicates **values** - expectations of behavior and outcomes. A leader describes the culture and atmosphere of the organization. Communication is not just in words but action. A leader communicates values by example. Every word and act is a communication. What do you have to say?

(U) Like I said, keep the cards and letters coming.

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